

Reviews

In this issue, to initiate a dialogue between readers and authors about current and significant issues in the field of dance research, the editors invite your participation in a "Readers Forum." To open the Forum, two scholars, one from Germany, the other from the United States, have been invited to discuss Susan Manning's recent book, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*. We encourage your response to their commentary and to the other articles and reviews in this issue. Please address correspondence to the Editor or the Reviews Editor, *Dance Research Journal*, and mail to Dance Program, Franklin & Marshall College, P.O. Box 3003, Lancaster, PA 17604-3003.

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ECSTASY AND THE DEMON: FEMINISM AND NATIONALISM IN THE DANCES OF MARY WIGMAN, by Susan A. Manning. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. xx + 353 pp., illustrations, photographs, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index. \$30.00.

In a two-part article entitled "A Behavioral Paradigm. Mary Wigman—the Search for the Lost World" (1), the East German dance historian Marion Kant discusses Wigman's political viewpoint and attitude during the period of National Socialism and the postwar years through 1949. Kant analyzes the written evidence by Wigman and concludes that the interpretations of German national traits, as represented by Wigman on the one hand and by National Socialism on the other, are identical (2).

The article and the responses it elicited are noteworthy to me, dealing as they do with the question (less relevant in the U.S. which has been democratic from its inception) of how 'public personages' handle dictatorial political systems. The question applies as much to

the discussion of the dictatorial system of the former German Democratic Republic (the East German communist system from 1949-89) as to the examination of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism during the Third Reich. A similar "desire for normalcy and forgetting," for example, concerning ways of behavior that in retrospect seem inexplicable ethically and/or morally, could be observed after the post-Communist German reunification just as it could be observed during the prosperous period of the West German 'economic miracle' of the fifties and sixties which followed the suppressive and shameful era of National Socialism.

Those people who knew Wigman personally indignantly rejected Kant's interpretation as malicious imputation (3). Others, born after the war, tried to approach the problem of political dictatorship and artists' responses to it within a socio- or cultural-historical context. They concluded that what had been missing in Germany was an understanding that art is integrated into social life. Artists did not see themselves in a sociopolitical context and thus did not judge the sociopolitical relevance of their actions (4). The German tradition of a pseudoliberal, bourgeois conservatism propagated the idea of individual freedom without following through to consider freedom as a social and economic condition for all people. (The GDR, on the other hand, pretended to be concerned about nothing but social policy in relation to individual conditions. Its ideology can be viewed as the reverse of bourgeois conservatism and thus is part of the same tradition.) German dance research—as this controversial discussion brings to light—now seeks to go beyond the conservative personality cult of its discipline and looks for sociopolitically relevant categories for the classification of art created under dictatorial systems. It thus also tries to generate a politically critical revision of Wigman's works.

In her book, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, Susan Manning appears to offer assistance in two ways: she proposes new methods of analysis and presents new results. The preface in particular holds out great promise: Manning contrasts traditional, i.e. psychological- biographical, inquiries, such as Hedwig

Mueller's, that are always sympathetic to the object under discussion with "sympathetically neutral," deconstructivist methods that—how fascinating to German eyes and ears—would help isolate the aesthetic of the work, describe the development from "Ausdruckstanz" to "Tanztheater" and re-interpret the relationship of Wigman to American Modern Dance. Manning calls these methods "ideological critique"; it allows us "[to conceptualize dance] as a cultural space where ... the categories and judgments that connect our utterances and practices to dominant structures and powers ... undergo dispute and transformation" (p. 27).

I do not so much want to discuss the details of Manning's research—the concept of her book is exciting, the source material absorbed by her is manifold and compelling, and her scientific intelligence and analytical capacity are undeniable. Nonetheless, I find the conclusions of her investigation to be of uneven quality. As a "lay" expert in the national reception of modern dance forms in the United States, I followed Manning's cross-cultural analysis of "Mary Wigman and the American Dance" with interest and approval. I could not help, though, feeling a fundamental methodological and ethical irritation with the other chapters of the book....

"Dispute and Transformation": Does the ideological critique as applied in the book really generate "dispute" and clarify aspects of "transformation"? Manning explores Wigman's choreographic development in chronological order and reconstructs the works that seem exemplary to her (group dances and solos) more comprehensively and in greater detail than had heretofore been done. She does not, however, always follow her premise from a purely aesthetic point of view, which for me would mean to focus on the product of creation, the work on stage; instead, Manning often relies on Wigman's highly self-referential autobiographical material, on quotations, and on excerpts from correspondence or journal entries—sources that refer more to the production and to the process of creation than to the appearance of the works on stage. Manning does not discuss the particular source qualities of

autobiography, choreography, and work, which is, in my view, a lack of referential differentiation contributing to the high degree of, admittedly, fascinating speculation and seductive reduction. The group dances are examined from the point of view of the extent to which they mirror nationalistic—which for Manning means fascist—ideas (5). As evidence of this fascist thought the author introduces the relationship between the group and Wigman, the leader—a matter of choreography. The solos, on the other hand, are examined above all from a feminist perspective; here Manning mainly deals with Wigman's relation to the male view of the audience—a matter of reception.

Thus, fascism and feminism seem not only to reveal themselves in the different genres of dance (group dances versus solo performances) but also to appear in distinct areas of the dance production (dramaturgic composition versus reception). And from the beginning they are accorded different appraisals in the geographical and chronological contexts of these chapters (Germany before versus during National Socialism). To identify fascist tendencies in Wigman's work means to ascribe to it dictatorial intentions that were initially supportive of the government and later outright conformist. The isolation of feminist tendencies, on the other hand, is to be explained in the sociopolitical context as critical, if not subversive, but the feminist potential did not have the same creative power as the fascist potential in the emerging and crystallizing National Socialism. The two categories of ideological critique are of different quality and explore different aspects of choreographic production. Manning lists them as symptomatic findings without critically discriminating between the two. What emerges are interesting fragments of thought but no sociopolitically relevant theory with which to determine, on principle, effective parameters for considering the relationship between aesthetics and ideology. Is "dispute" in fact possible on the basis of a mere accumulation of fragments? Can "transformation" be effectively seen without clearly defining the relationship between parameters?

"Categories and Judgments": Can

one accurately evaluate "categories and judgments" without taking into account the historical lineage of the culture in question? During the course of the book, Manning's lines of interpretation of fascism on the one hand and feminism on the other run parallel and do not meet because Manning, while defining dance as "cultural space," disregards the specific "cultural space" of dance in Germany. This "cultural space" was nurtured by a variety of philosophical, even cosmological, ideas about nature, body, rhythm, and woman, which, as early as the second half of the nineteenth century, were meant to help people to overcome social alienation. The cosmological ideas alone, however, failed to alter the social alienation. The National Socialists finally adopted certain aspects of the existent philosophies and interpreted them as practical social devices and direct prescriptions. They thereby elevated, or "empowered," these ideas to "dominant structures." In her book, Manning does not investigate the genesis of these "powers and dominant structures" in Germany, without which the identification of ideologies in Wigman's work becomes a cliché in itself. She leaves herself open to the question: when does "judgment" become "prejudice?" She avoids treating ideology as an issue of changing, but always specific, texture; rather, she presupposes the correlation between Wigman's work and fascism and feminism. To the German eye and ear this postulation requires at the least discussion: the search for sociopolitically relevant (i.e. qualitative) criteria for considering ideologies must result from a critical view of historical concepts and cultural practices. For example, is the early work of Martha Graham (pre) "fascist" because she utilized a leader-group choreographic structure? Manning, however, sees ideology as choreographic strategy and ideological critique as strategy for the academic study of dance. What I miss in Manning's intelligent, but hermetic, analysis is the substantial and contextual, i.e. political, dimension of ideological critique. It would be present if Manning were to juxtapose fascism with resistance or inner emigration, for instance, or feminism with, say, patriarchal structures—that is, if she would relate the ideologies to other relevant

parameters.

"Utterances and Practices": To what extent do the "utterances and practices" of the historian's methodology influence the understanding and evaluation of the historical "utterances and practices" in question? Neglecting the particular historical implications of ideology in Germany, Manning focuses on strategic argumentation. Another example is her construction of German postwar dance history in the chapter "From 'Ausdruckstanz' to 'Tanztheater.'" The author sees the aesthetics of German dance in the postwar period up to the students' revolt in 1968 as structurally and ideologically continuous, while, from her perspective, Tanztheater, starting in the seventies, departs markedly from the premises of Ausdruckstanz. German dance historians arrive at the opposite conclusion. They focus on the cultural lineage including an unconscious conformity with any political system in power—dictatorial as before World War II, or democratic as thereafter. In so doing, they view Ausdruckstanz as related to National Socialism and as disappearing after the war. The students' revolt candidly claimed the necessity "to come to terms with the past." The discussion, however, continued to maintain the taboo on any connection between politics and art. German dance historians, including myself, still give priority to historical continuity and see many of the conceptual and aesthetic values of Ausdruckstanz re-established in Tanztheater. The German interpretation, thus, follows traditional cultural usage and is, admittedly, politically conformist, i.e. apolitical. In this context, Manning does provide interesting and valuable reading, which contrasts the integrative practice of European-German adherence to tradition with the eclectic, confrontationist practice of American thinking.

To summarize: Susan Manning's book points up the culturally distinct ways of interpreting ideology and ideological critique in both countries. This divergence, however, impedes the compatibility of concrete results for a politically oriented study of dance that I anticipated. Nevertheless, Manning has dealt with a German taboo, the ideological implications of art and dance, ear-

lier, more courageously and more provocatively than we, her German colleagues, have. I believe that the incipient confrontation with the sociopolitical importance of artistic activity taking place in Germany is in part owing to her continuous and spirited investigative work.

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1. *Tanzdrama* 25.2 (1994): 14-19 and 26.3/1994:16-21.
2. In this context, answers to the following questions are irrelevant: (1) whether Marion Kant (or any other scholar) should have presented critically the method of decoding literary remains of nonliterati in an appropriate scholarly manner; and (2) whether the author (ab)uses Wigman in the projection of her own coming to terms with the/her GDR past.
3. *Tanzdrama* 27.4 (1994): 30-32.
4. See, for example, Klein, Gabriele. "The Demystification of Myth. On the German in Mary Wigman's View of Life" ("Die Entzauberung des Mythos. Über das Deutsche im Weltbild Mary Wigmans"). *Tanzdrama* 27.4 (1994): 28-30.
5. In the chapter "Mary Wigman and American Dance," nationalist has a different, less totalitarian tinge; as is symptomatic of Manning's approach, she does not sufficiently realize the complexity of these shifts in interpretation.

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The practice of cultural history has been revitalized by a number of recent theoretical and methodological debates within the fields of literary theory and historiography. *Ecstasy and the Demon* is a fine example of this revitalization and a particularly important contribution towards a new cultural history of modernity. It is also most directly, and

perhaps most controversially, a contribution towards remodeling the field of dance history. As Manning notes in her opening sentence, her study moves "from the discipline of dance studies into an interdisciplinary space bounded by ongoing dialogues on the history of the body and the sexual and national politics of artistic modernism" (p. xiii). But the look back into dance studies (or for that matter into theatre studies or German studies, my own disciplinary precincts) from this space provides insights to which older historical paradigms remain—must remain—blind.

All things considered, Manning's study is also a relatively early one. It's worth stressing that a book published in 1993 would have been written over the several years before. And, as Manning notes in her Introduction, while several of the methods she employs had even then become "the new establishment" in other disciplines within the humanities, their application is new to dance studies (p. 10). Actually, while I daresay Manning's statement is correct, it's also too modest. Not only have the methods she employs continued to develop, but their application continues to spark controversy; they remain anything but the establishment in theatre studies, for example. Manning's discussion exhibits some "first-generation" problems, as it were. But to recognize these is merely to engage her model's capacity to generate productive inquiry. And I am hardly alone in finding her model productive; *Ecstasy and the Demon* shared the 1994 De La Torre Bueno Prize of the Dance Perspectives Foundation.

Quite apart from anything else, Manning's is the first book-length study on Wigman in English (aside from Manning's own 1987 dissertation) and, so far as I know, the first book on Wigman in any language since the German biographer Hedwig Müller's 1986 *Mary Wigman*. Manning's core chapters (2-6) develop "a narrative of [Mary Wigman's] choreographic career" (p. xiv). Her Introduction and opening chapter clarify the point of view from which this narrative is written.

Manning agrees "with other commentators" in defining "Wigman's choreographic modernism in terms of her project to make dance an autonomous language, a project abbreviated by the

term 'absolute dance'" (p. 2). But Manning also wants her narrative to account for two other major factors of Wigman's career. First, she wants to pay more than lip-service to the fact that Wigman choreographed her group dances of the teens and twenties with and for other women; her discussion of the relationship between Wigman's choreography and her all-female company moves out from considerations of form to draw from research into the women's movements and utopian communities of the early century. Second, as Manning demonstrates throughout her book by passing the extant dance-history literature in review, "to position Wigman in a parade of modernists advancing the formal values of pure dance does not answer the question of why she and so many of her colleagues collaborated with National Socialism" (p. xv); and this is a question no narrative about Wigman's career can avoid.

Consequently, Manning breaks with a "parade of modernists" historiography that narrates the development of modern dance in terms of a formalist teleology—a progression through the technical accomplishments of one's predecessors to a culmination in whatever current approach one wants to champion. To make this break, however, the narrator must position herself outside the very premise of modern art, which begins by positing itself as a "language" that is, precisely, "autonomous"—divorced from any causal interconnection to the historical moments within which it is developed. That this is as much an ideological as an aesthetic premise is one fact these narratives have been at pains to hide—not least those developed in the United States. Manning drives this insight home in her closing chapter on "Mary Wigman and American Dance," which challenges dance historians to continue the inquiries Manning has initiated by rewriting the history of American dance.

Manning anchors her divergence from the old orthodoxies of art-form historiography by positioning her narrative within two theoretical frames: feminism and nationalism. These frames bid fair to illuminate the connections on which she wants to focus. However, she constructs these frames a bit too rigidly from a contemporary per-